

# *Study on the Structure and Form of the Shaman Dance in the Fishing and Hunting Nationalities*

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**Abstract**—The article sorts out and summarises the results of Shaman dance research. Analyse the structural form of Shaman dance in the shamanic religious rituals by taking the semiotics research method and analysing the social function of Shaman dance and its realisation through the use of the "structural-functional" theory in cultural chemistry. This provides a basis for studying some fundamental issues between Shaman dance and the survival of minorities.

**Keywords**—Dance; Folk dance; Shaman dance; The fishing and hunting nationality

## I. INTRODUCTION

Some of the Oroqen, Ewenki and Hezhe people in the northeastern region of China believe in shamanism. Most of them live in the Greater Khingan Range area in the middle and upper reaches of the Heilongjiang River and the Three-River Plain in which the Songhua River, Heilongjiang River and Wusuli River meet[1-2]. Because the natural environment limits their place of residence, social development is relatively slow.

Ewenki means "people living in the mountains." In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the Ewenki migrated into three parts: the first part lived in the Weilu River and the Vitim River in the tributary of the Lena River in the northeast of Lake Baikal, and the group using the reindeer was called the "Suolun Biebu"; The second part lives in the eastern part of Lake Nagar, to the area of the Chita River, and uses the horse called "Nameita"; the third part lives in the area north of Heilongjiang, called "Sorren"[3]. Because of the eastward invasion of Russia, the Ewenki people began to move southward. During the Shunzhi period, part of "Nameita" moved to the forests of the Ergun River Basin, and they were still engaged in fishing and hunting activities. Their Shaman dance is the object of this paper. The other part of "Nameita" moved to the grassland area of Hulunbeier Prairie Chenbarhu banner, and they developed into a nomadic socioeconomic stage[4]. The "Sorren" in the middle and upper reaches of Heilongjiang River, they migrated to the Greater Khingan Range area, and their socio-economic approach combines fishing, hunting, nomadic and farming. Although Shaman dance was influenced by farming civilisation to a certain extent, it still retains a large number of original forms.

"Oroqen" means "a person who uses reindeer." They mainly live in the vast areas of the southern outer Hinggan mountains and the Heilongjiang River Basin. In the 17th century, the Oroqen family began to move south like other northern minorities. Their residences are mainly distributed in Aihui County, Xunke County and Nenjiang River Basin in the middle reaches of Heilongjiang River. In the Qing Dynasty, some Oroqen people were included in the Eight Banners, and the other part was dedicated to raising martens, and hunting in the deep forest[5-6].

"Hezhe" means "people in the East and downstream". Hezhe is a descendant of the Jurchen family. "Three-River is home, live on fishing and hunting" is a description of its way of life. The Hezhe lived in a house built of birch bark, both hunting in the forest and fishing in the river. At present, there are only about 4,000 people in Hezhe, who are located in Tongjiang County and Fuyuan County in Heilongjiang Province.

Although these three ethnic groups have vast differences in cultural traditions and languages, they have presented many similarities in their Shaman dance. At the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic, they all used fishing and hunting as their primary form of social production. Their social order is relatively stable, there has never been a sharp social change, and they have been at the end of the paternal clan stage for a long time. The shamanic religious rituals are hardly modified by other forms of civilisation, thus preserving their quaint forms. For a long time, these three ethnic minorities have migrated and hunted in the deep forests of the Northeast, and they have less contact with the outside world[7]. They use fishing and hunting to maintain a self-sufficient economy. Because of the influence of geographical environment factors, this objectively blocks the penetration of foreign cultures, which is why Shamanism has the opportunity to develop independently. The Shaman dance of these three groups directly inherits the original form of Shamanism and is, therefore, closer to the "original". These three groups live in interlaced geographical areas, they intermarry, and there are extensive exchanges in economic and cultural life, which is why their Shaman dance has formed some shared content. Therefore, it is necessary to study the Shaman dance of these three nations as a community.

Shaman dance plays a significant role in the organisational life of the fishing and hunting nationality: one is to pray for the

gods to bless the rich in the Spring Festival ceremony; the other is to treat the disease through the help of God. Use god's power to drive away the sick demons. Next, this paper introduces the structure of the Shaman dance of the fishing and hunting nationality from the aspects of Spring Festival ceremony dance and healing dance.

## II. THE SHAMANISTIC RITUAL OF THE FISHING AND HUNTING NATIONALITY

### A. *The basic situation of Shaman Spring ceremony of the fishing and hunting nationality*

The Spring Festival Ceremony is the most solemn shaman ritual of the fishing and hunting nationality[8]. In May, ice and snow began to melt, and everything in the forest began to recover. The purpose of the Spring Festival is to pray for the Spirit to enhance the reproductive capacity of the flora and fauna and clan members of the clan, and to bless the clan to acquire more prey and flourish in the New Year, so the ceremony is generally chosen to be held in May.

#### 1) *The analysis of the structure of the spring festival dance*

The form of Spring Festival dance refers to the formal elements presented directly by vision and hearing. These include: sacrificial day, sacrificial arena, God idols, sacrificial shaman and other environmental elements; procedure elements such as greeting god, inviting god, changing god, dancing god, sending God and rewarding god; dance elements such as dance instruments, dance costumes, dancers, dance gestures and dance names. The analysis of these morphological features is the entrance to the exploration of their cultural connotations.

The Ewenki's spring festival is called "Omina", hosted by the tribe Mokun Shaman. The shaman is to protect the safety of the members of this clan and to perform related religious ceremonies. The level of its status depends on the number of antlers on the cap. After each spring ceremony, the shaman's cap will add two-handed antlers. According to Old Ewenki's memory, the process of Spring Festival Ceremony is described as follows: Before Spring Festival, people erect two birch trees and two larch trees outside their residence, then pull out a thin leather rope from the interior of the residence and tie it to the erected tree after a circle around the residence, which is completed by Shaman[9-10]. The offerings are usually deer, so Shaman kills the deer, cuts the lungs into thin strips, hangs them on a thin leather rope, then puts the deer's head into hot water, and then hangs the God idols (nine male and nine female) made of iron sheets onto the leather rope. On the ground, lay the skin of the deer used for sacrifice, then put nine bouquet bowls on it in two rows, and fill the bowl with the blood of the deer sacrifice. The next step is to invite God and dance for God. The order of inviting God is the ancestor god and then animal god. The shaman who possesses the gods should jump around the tree, send off one God and sing a divine song to invite the next god. According to the records, the Spring Festival also includes praying for the safety of all clan members. Shaman gathered all his people between birch and larch, and then tied them tightly together with dog skin ropes. If the rope gets longer, it will indicate that in the new year, the population of the tribe will increase, and the four seasons will be safe. If the

rope is shorter, it means that there will be disease or population decrease in the New Year.



Fig. 1. The Ewenki Shaman – Cow, pull the god's clothes

The Oroqen Spring Festival is to erect "oblique benevolent pillars" in the centre of the ceremonial venue and erect two wooden poles in the centre of the pillars, which are used as a platform for God's coming. Tie red cloth on the top of one pole and yellow cloth on the other. Between the two poles, tie a small wooden pole about one meter from the ground. Shaman arranged the God idols in order, which were Eagle God, Ancestor God and Grass God. On the lower floor, there are sun gods, moon gods and so on. The sacrifices are the wild geese, ducks and other prey hunted and slaughtered by clan members, which are placed in front of the God doll. Next is the decontamination of the altar with incense and the roasting of Shaman drums on the fire. With the help of an assistant (usually a younger shaman), the shaman puts on a divine skirt, a divine hat, and sits in front of the puppet, beating drums and singing divine songs. Shaman's assistants explained the contents of the sacrifices to the participants and reported the purpose of the sacrifices to the gods. People began offering sacrifices to the gods, and then the gods would descend on the shaman[11]. Then the assistant will sing to the Shaman on behalf of the Oroqen people to pray for the gods to protect the people's wealth and health. After the duet, the assistant put a bowl of animal blood on the drum. Shaman stood up and took up the bowl, making a "grunt" sound. Shaman spins and sings with drums. After singing, Shaman drank the animal blood and took the rest of the blood around the people. Later, he handed the bowl to his assistant, and the shaman hit the drum sharply, and his body began to tremble violently. With the tightening of the drums, Shaman began to exert his feet. Then he put the drum on his abdomen and jumped up with his strength. After several repetitions, I began to close my eyes. At this time, God has come to Shaman's body, in the voice of assistant drums, Shaman will slowly wake up. The appendage is Aniran ancestor god. Shaman sings songs of praise to his ancestors, stands up, beats drums, and moves his body around in the rotation, turning it into a jump. He alternates one-foot jump and two-foot jump, holding drums in his abdomen, and makes a cry of "HeHe". Then, the Shaman would use the drum as a weapon to assault and expel the devils in the clan around the "Xieren pillar", which means to drive away the devils in the clan. After confirming that the devil was expelled, the shaman drank the remaining animal blood. Then the Shaman begins to spin, and in his spin throws the drum to his assistant, and in the spin

throws the skirt into the air, which means that the ancestor god left the Shaman's body and returned to heaven. At this time, Shaman fell to the ground and was unconscious for some time. At the call of an assistant, it slowly returns to normal. Then, according to the visiting order of God idols, gods are invited and sent. In the end, the shaman sings the God song and burns incense before the throne to worship. The Spring Festival Ceremony of Oroqen was completed[12]. During the Spring Festival, there were also competitions between shamans, who won the respect of clans by singing divine songs, dancing and witchcraft.



Fig. 2. Oroqen Shaman dance



Fig. 3. Oroqen Spring Festival shaman dance

The Spring Festival of Hezhe people is also called "dance for the God of deer". Spring Festival has multiple functions such as offering sacrifices to gods and exorcising ghosts and praying for blessings. During the Spring Festival, members of the clan formed some divine teams, a team dedicated to leading the dove pole, a team carrying patron god Amy, a team holding knives, drums and other items. The crowd will form a square according to Shaman's requirements. Shaman wears skirts and hats, boots and gloves, Sazhka and Buckchun, and then leads the Divine Song behind the divine team. The divine team entered and left the clan members' houses in order from west to east. After entering the house, the God idols and artifacts were sacrificed on the Kang Table and turned into a semi-circle with willows. Shaman started from the main house, jumped three times like jumping rope, and jumped into the West house. After three trips, the shaman enters the next house. Finally, return to the shaman's home to thank God and send God. Everyone drinks and eats meat together, and the Spring Festival is over.

After introducing the necessary forms of Shaman dance of the three minority nationalities, the author sums up the actual contents of the expressive elements by analysing the existing

background of the expressive elements and provides a reference for exploring the cultural connotation of the fishing and hunting nationality Shaman dance.



Fig. 4. Hezhe Shaman Dance



Fig. 5. Hezhe deer dance

## 2) An Analysis of the Background of the Fishing and hunting National Spring Festival Shaman dance

As a necessary element of Shaman religious rites, it is impossible to study the fishing and hunting nationality's Shaman dance comprehensively and objectively without the shaman religious rites. It is also necessary to examine the expression elements of the Spring Festival dance from the overall background of the Spring Festival Ritual of Shaman.

By summarising the expression elements and ritual procedures of the fishing and hunting nationality shaman spring sacrifice ceremony, we find that its existence background is that the time of sacrifice is usually chosen in the spring when the ice and snow melt, and everything grows. Because in their view, holding memorials in spring can enhance their proliferation effect. The divine tree is an indispensable element in the arrangement of the shrine. It is the link between God and man, and it places the position of God near the shrine. There are many kinds of God puppet, which is a manifestation of the polytheism of Shamanism. The most common God puppet is the bird god. The blood of livestock is a typical sacrifice in sacrifices. They believe that the vitality of livestock blood can enhance the divine power of the gods. The sacrifice takes the form of direct contact with the gods. The sacrifices are delivered to the gods by steam, or the blood of livestock is smeared on the god's dolls or the mouth of the shaman. The purpose of the Spring Festival implies the

comprehensive multiplication of human beings, objects and gods.

The procedure of Spring Festival is composed of six steps: shaman greeting God, inviting God, changing God, dancing God, sending God and rewarding God. The worship of the gods is the basis of communication between people and gods. Drum beating is a medium for people to communicate with God, which provides a context for people to communicate with God in the process of inviting God. Metamorphosis is the shaman's abnormal body movements to express the transformation of man to God, which is the basis of man's substitution for myth. Dancing God is Shaman's imitation of God's gesture and action to achieve the purpose of ritual prayer "multiplication". Spirit's drinking animal blood is the multiplication of divine power, God's blessing is the multiplication of human's survival ability, and man's changing into God is the multiplication of his ability. Gods are sent back to human beings through the coma and other ways. Rewarding God is a way of communicating people's gratitude for God's blessings. To sum up, the fishing and hunting nationality Shaman dance expression elements exist in the background to achieve the religious purpose of "proliferation".

### *3) The analysis of the expression elements of the dance and hunting nationality in the spring festival Shaman dance*

In the Spring Festival Ceremony, dancing appeared in the link between greeting God and rewarding God, because dancing is the most important means of expression in the whole ceremony. The main contents of the three stages of inviting God, sending God and rewarding God are through the recitation of divine words and the singing of divine songs, but Shaman dance is indispensable for creating the atmosphere of Spring Festival. Because the content of dance is only simple ringing bells and drumming, the elements of expression are not analysed here. In the stage of transformation, Shaman entirely relies on dance language to realise the transformation from man to god. The main dance movements are rotation, jump and some extraordinary body movements. These dance movements mainly express the transformation of human beings into gods.

Shaman dance is the essence of the fishing and hunting nationality. Therefore, the expression elements of Shaman dance are summarised as follows: dancing utensils and clothing have the function of eliminating ghosts. Dance forms mostly imitate the gestures and actions of gods, which are used to express the meaning of "multiplication" of rituals. The melody of dance is from slow to fast, expressing the "multiplication" of gods, people and things with the acceleration of rhythm. Dance simulates the natural gods and ancestor gods of personality, and the main body of dance is Shaman.

### *B. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications Shaman dance structure of the fishing and hunting nationality treatment*

One of the functions of Shaman is to offer sacrifices, and the other is to cure diseases. The fishing and hunting nationality's living environment is worse, so their medical and health conditions are not good. In addition, people's beliefs are

superstitious, so it is still prevalent for people to treat illness by dancing God.

### *1) Brief introduction of the Ewenki, Oroqen and Hezhe Shaman dance in treating diseases*

In the Ewenki, after Shaman arrived at the patient's home, he first burned Artemisia for the gods, then baked drums, put on sacred clothes, and then wore God idols and small bronze mirrors to protect the gods on his chest. With drumsticks in one hand and drums in the other, he chanted incantations in his mouth to pray for the coming of the gods. At this time, Shaman will close his eyes and speed up the beat of drums. After completing the possession of the gods, the shaman will sway from side to side and shout at the evil spirits. Then he will jump outside the door and shoot grass-rooted ghost puppets with bows and arrows. After that, the treatment ceremony was completed. In Ewenki's soul-calling ceremony, two reindeer, one black and one white, should be prepared beforehand, and the time for divine dancing is usually at night. The first is to kill the black reindeer, which is used to provide the shaman with a ride into another world to bring back the lost soul of the patient. After that, the shaman jumps for a while, then extinguishes the fire handle, and then runs back and forth in the village. This is to catch the lost soul. The shaman returned to the patient's home and lit the torch. If there is a child's hair on the face of the god drum, it is the soul. If it is a boy, his father will wrap his hair in a clean cloth and puts it in the armpit and closes the belt. If it is a girl, her mother should pack her hair with a clean cloth and put it under her ass. Then the soul will not fly again. The next day will kill the white reindeer for the Maru.

Oroqen Shaman dance also takes place at night. Shaman will wear a cassock and sit in the northwest corner of the "Xieren Pillar". His eyes are half open and half closed. After yawning for several consecutive times, he will hit the drum. When the drum beats were tight, the shaman began to shake all over, and his teeth began to sound, and his eyes closed completely, which means that the gods began to attach themselves. After being possessed by the gods, you need to take a burning charcoal fire and put it under the shaman's feet. The shaman would beat drums in a hurry and a slow way and hummed some god songs that others could not understand. Then the shaman stops beating drums and sings loudly, and the rest of the participants in the ceremony will echo the shaman's song. Shaman inquired about his reasons in the name of the god, and the relatives of the patient answered that someone was ill. Then Shaman stood up, drummed and sang, and asked the patient if he had offended a god. If the patient trembles when he hears the name of a god, it means that God caused the illness. After that, he will offer sacrifices to the great God to relieve the disease.

In 1958, a survey of minority customs described the Hezhe Shaman's healing dance as follows: the relatives of the patients need to bring a pot of wine to invite Shaman to dance gods. In the Shaman's home, it is necessary to drink a little wine and kowtow and lift incense to the gods invited by the Shaman. The time for divine dance is also at night, when divine dance, the house cannot light. In the central hall of the main room, the incense burner is placed, and the vanilla is burned in the



incense burner. Shaman sits in a meditative position on the edge of the patient's bed, side to side or back to the patient. Shaman's assistant squats behind the patient and puts his hand on the patient's shoulder. Shaman began to pray and recite the prayer words. After praying, he asked God about the cause of the illness on the patient. According to the beating condition of the patient's muscles, determine whether the cause of the disease is accurate. If the devil causes it, the shaman will drive the devil away. If the patient's soul is caught, the shaman will invite God to fight the devil. After dancing God, the shaman has to send God and reward God. They usually cook millet for God to enjoy (usually Shaman and others eat that).

### 2) *Background analysis of the existence of the fishing and hunting nationality offering Shaman dance*

The ritual background of Shaman dance is summarized as follows: Shaman dance usually takes place at night. Because ghosts are nocturnal, it is easier for them to expel demons by holding ceremonies at night. Most of the ceremonies are held in patients' homes, and the shrines are purified by burning incense to welcome the coming of God. The position of God is fixed. The God idol is the patron saint of the shaman because it seems that it is easier for the shaman to gain divine power. There are two ways to reward God, and one is to contribute to the real thing, the other is to purify God with fire or incense.

The procedure of healing ceremony is also composed of six steps: shaman greeting God, inviting God, changing God, dancing God, sending God and rewarding God. Contributing sacrifices and burning incense to purify sacrifices are the basis of communication between people and gods. Drum beating is a medium for people to communicate with God, which provides a context for people to communicate with God in the process of inviting God. Metamorphosis is the shaman's abnormal body movements to express the transformation of human beings to gods, and it is the basis for human beings to replace gods to expel evil spirits and treat diseases. Jumping God is a shaman's imitation of exorcism and soul-calling to prevent the devil from violating life. Sending God is to restore the normal state of Shamans, and rewarding God is a way of communicating people's gratitude for God's blessed life.

### 3) *The analysis of the expression elements of the shaman dance in the fishing and hunting nationality*

Same as the Spring Festival, dancing is the primary form of expression in the whole fishing and hunting nationality shaman treatment ceremony. The beating of drums is the central expression in the praying, sending and rewarding links. In the process of changing spirit and dancing spirit, dance is enriched in form and rhythm. In conclusion, the props of the fishing and hunting nationality dance are mainly drums, bows and arrows with supernatural powers in their concepts. Dancing costumes are God skirts, God hats and bronze mirrors that have special effects on dispelling evil spirits. The form of dance is to express the scene of catching and dispelling ghosts with body language. Dance rhythm is also a process from slow to fast,

showing the increasing power of Shaman. The object of dance simulation is the patron saint of Shaman.

### III. CONCLUSION

Through the study of the structure of the fishing and hunting nationality Shaman dance, we can see that the essence of Shaman dance's structure is the rhetorical way of existence of minorities. Shaman dance indicates the existence of God through the body posture of Shaman, and finally completes the narration of the way of life. In terms of form and content, it is mainly used to serve the survival and development of the nation, which is a way for human beings to adapt to and transform the natural environment. The narration of the way of life is an organisational process of rhetorical expression. In the construction of dance's morphological structure, we can draw on Shaman dance's rhetorical devices such as imitation, indicative metaphor and so on.

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